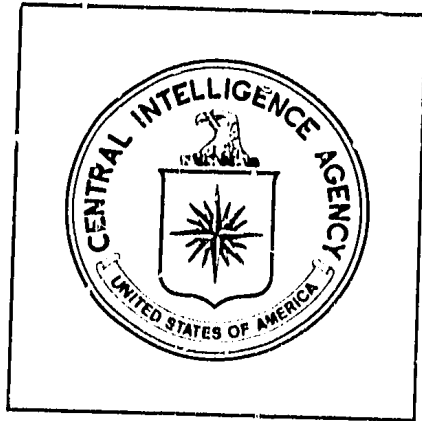


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MIDDLE EAST - AFRICA - SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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SECRETIsrael - West Bank*The Troubled Tombs*

In a decision that has already come under heavy Arab fire, the Israeli cabinet on August 4 agreed to change the long-standing arrangements regulating Jewish and Muslim worship at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank town of Hebron. The cabinet took up the highly emotional issue on the recommendation of Defense Minister Peres, acting in his capacity as Minister for the Occupied Territories, who bowed to growing pressure from Jewish settlement groups over the past few weeks for more unrestricted access to Hebron.

A knowledgeable Israeli correspondent told US embassy officers last week that Jewish settlement groups provoked a number of recent clashes between Muslims and Jews in Hebron. Their aim was to force the government to intervene to defuse the situation, hopefully by giving in to the settlers' demands.

Under the new rules, separate sections of the Tomb, known to Muslims as the Mosque of Abraham, are reserved for Muslim and Jewish worshippers, with separate entrances for each. All time limitations on the use of the Tomb have been lifted, except that no Jewish services can be held on Friday, the Muslim Holy day, until sundown. Peres had agreed earlier that old Jewish sites in Hebron, such as the synagogue and the cemetery, would be fenced off.

The old procedures had been carefully worked out shortly after the 1967 war to guarantee the joint use of the area by Jews and Muslims. Arab reaction to the changes has been predictably negative. The Supreme Muslim Council in Jerusalem has already rejected the new arrangement, claiming it partitions the Tomb which, it holds, is entirely a Muslim mosque. The Council called on all Muslim Imams to devote their sermons on Friday, August 8, to the issue, an act which is sure to inflame Arab passions even further.

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The Jordanians have already raised the matter with the US. Other Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, are likely to follow. Jordanian Prime Minister Rifai made a major point of the issue during a conversation with Ambassador Pickering on August 7. Rifai warned that there is likely to be a very serious adverse reaction in the Arab and Muslim world to the Israeli "partitioning" of the Tomb.

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Iraq

Navigation Proposal

Iraq has circulated among Persian Gulf states a draft "declaration on free navigation in the Arab Gulf and Strait of Hormuz." The document is Baghdad's interpretation of what regional security cooperation should be. It illustrates the wide gap between Baghdad and Tehran on the form of such cooperation, and reflects their equally conflicting stances on Law of the Sea.

The Iraqi draft calls for free navigation for all commercial vessels--subject to local anti-pollution laws--and for naval vessels of contracting states. All other warships are to refrain from using threats or force against littoral states while in the Gulf, and are to be subject to the provisions of international law.

The Shah of Iran has complained that such an approach to regional security is essentially meaningless, because it gives no protection to littoral states not already available through international law. In reply, the Iraqis have made clear that they do not intend to participate in a more comprehensive security pact with binding military commitments.

Even if the Shah could accept the Iraqis' more narrow approach, he would reject their generally relaxed attitude toward the presence of foreign naval vessels. The Shah wants to strictly control entry and movement of all foreign warships in the Gulf.

The Iraqi approach offers no such control. Rather, it reflects the desire of Baghdad's principal backer, the USSR, for unimpeded naval entry into the Gulf, as well as Baghdad's desire to block Iranian attempts to establish hegemony in the area. Iran's naval power would be paramount locally if the Gulf were closed to all foreign warships.

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Baghdad's preference for continued unimpeded access to the Gulf by Soviet warships was also behind its description of the entrance to the Gulf, the Straits of Hormuz, as connecting "the high sea in the Gulf of Oman with the high sea of the Persian Gulf." The high-sea-to-high-sea approach is favored by the larger maritime powers in Low of the Sea negotiations to help justify the unimpeded passage of their ships.

Iran, on the other hand, since mid-1969 has been devising ways to have the Persian Gulf declared a "closed sea." In 1970 the Shah said, "By declaring the Persian Gulf an inland sea, the littoral states would be able to control and check all shipping in their waterway..." The term "semi-enclosed" has since crept into the Iranian lexicon, but their intention has not changed.

Oman is also unlikely to accept the Iraqi formulation. Like Iran, it borders on the Straits of Hormuz. Oman is one of the half dozen or so hard-core opponents of a Law of the Sea declaration supporting unimpeded passage through international straits. Oman favors discrimination against warships and ships possessing "special characteristics"-- a catch phrase for nuclear-powered ships and super-tankers. Oman also wants coastal states to have the right to require notification or authorization for the passage of warships. Such restrictions are totally unacceptable to the US and other maritime powers.

The vehemence of the Omani position at Law of the Sea conferences is surprising. Their fledgling bureaucracy is relatively inexperienced in such complex international matters, and their security would not seem to require the restrictions they propose.

25X1 Conceivably, the Omanis serve as a stalking horse for the Shah, who would have more difficulty backing off from an extreme position. Oman and Iran already cooperate on Gulf security matters, and relations are good between the Shah and Sultan Qabus.

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Tunisia

Rehabilitation of Ex-Foreign Minister Possible

President Bourguiba may rehabilitate former foreign minister Mohamed Masmoudi, now in exile in Libya. Masmoudi was banished over a year ago for what Bourguiba described as behavior not consistent with the policy of the national party and government. Masmoudi has bitterly and publicly criticized Tunisia's political system since his fall, and has courted Tunisian dissidents in Libya and in Europe. He has made no personal attacks against Bourguiba, however, and thereby kept open the possibility of an eventual return to Bourguiba's good graces. Bourguiba has a penchant for rehabilitating formerly trusted advisors after a period of banishment and a formal apology from them.

US officials in Tunis note that Masmoudi's return will probably encounter stiff opposition from Prime Minister Nour, who blamed Masmoudi for encouraging the abortive Tunisian-Libyan merger agreement of January 1974. It was Nour who advised Bourguiba to remove Masmoudi. A full reconciliation between Nour and Masmoudi is unlikely.

Bourguiba's concern over Libya's intentions toward Tunisia and Masmoudi's involvement with dissidents may have generated the plan to bring the former minister home. His return will probably be viewed by Tunisian officials as one way of reducing Libyan efforts to use Tunisian dissidents for subversion against Bourguiba.

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